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Moving from commitments to results: transforming public institutions to facilitate inclusive policy formulation and integration in the implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals: improving engagement and communication between Governments and stakeholders, including through access to information, open government and electronic and mobile solutions

Institutional capacity for the administration of public space in sustainable development: interaction between government and society

Note by the Secretariat

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Institutional capacity for the administration of public space in sustainable development: interaction between government and society

Summary

The present paper reflects on ways to enhance the responsiveness of public, social and private institutions in order to improve quality of life in a public space that comprises public interest, public values and public influence at the global, national and local levels. The author observes that the gradual expansion of public space into the private sphere constrains both individual actions and the discretionary exercise of State authority. The complexity of sustainable development itself places difficult demands on government.

Given these constraints, as well as increased citizen expectations, an inclusive, systemic approach to the interaction between government and society is needed. The author finds that institutional capacity for the administration of the public space is linked to a systemic approach through a common purpose, for example in the form of the sustainable development goals, rationality of institutions, professionalism of the public sector, strategic communications and effective policy implementation.

The author identifies a number of key principles for the administration of the public space in pursuit of sustainable development, namely, openness, proper management of decision-making that incorporates consultative processes, clarity of roles within a framework of shared responsibility, and an enabling legal framework. At the same time, the author indicates that attention should be given to the proper administration of justice, corruption prevention, administrative reform, including through the use of information and communications technology, and fiscal prudence, all of which in turn strengthen civic capacity and help to build trust.

I. Introduction

1. This paper discusses how to increase the responsiveness of public, social and private institutions through responsible interaction in order to improve the quality of life in public space, linked with the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. The task requires in-depth analysis of the purposes of the State in the current context of complexity, given that the strictly private and personal sphere is contracting as public space expands; awareness of the gradual restriction of the family or social sphere; and openness to scrutiny by third parties in the light of the expansion of the original charter of human rights[1] and the increased number of social rights. In practice, this has taken the form of objective limitations on the discretionary exercise of State authority.[2]

II. Public space

3. In order to construct the concept of "public space", it is important to refer to three of its components: public interest, public value and the public sphere in daily life, the last of which should be considered in the light of the first two, whether at the global (macro) level, the regional or continental (meso) level or the national (micro) level, which includes the subnational and local levels, as will be seen later.

4. The public interest — a synonym of the common good, *res publica*, *vox populi*, or other meanings that have found a place in a philosophical, legal, political, sociological, religious and, of course, governmental debate through the centuries — represents that common "something" that affects the community as a whole.

5. The concept implies the fulfilment of the purposes of the State and, therefore, imposes on it a responsibility[3] which, in human evolution, has been attributed solely to the person or persons responsible for political leadership, i.e. the government, whether the systems for the exercise of power are fragile or primitive ones, or more complex ones that have evolved from experience of all the known types of regimes of authority and legitimacy.

The expansion of public space

6. However, this responsibility has been gradually expanding from the division of power, electoral systems and party politics, access to governmental public information, transparency and accountability, and so on, to the formulation of a shared direction; that is, joint responsibility between government and society for ensuring overall social welfare, national security, the lives and integrity of persons and property, political and economic stability and, in line with future perspectives, sustainability.

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[1] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. See http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html.

[2] The proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the increased number of specific social causes, the emergence of new social media, and government openness to public oversight beyond that carried out by parliaments or congresses.

[3] The nature of this responsibility is legal (rule of law), political (institutional resolution of conflicts), social (committed participation) and economic (stability).

Application of the systemic approach in the analysis of complex public space

7. The current circumstances necessitate a redefinition of public space through a systemic vision of its complexity. Bringing together these two theoretical approaches (systems and complexity),[4] with a view to explaining the real world and developing the capacity to adapt to it,[5] helps us to understand the pre-text, the con-text and the text,[6] and decision-making in the various evolving situations of societies in the world.

8. Systemic thinking is vital in order to act assertively in the modern world. It is likely that Ludwig von Bertalanffy[7] and other classical scientists who followed him did not foresee how profound his theory would prove to be in practice: there are few things so necessary at the current time in history as to apply this thinking in the political and administrative arena.

9. Below is an attempt to demonstrate the "puzzle" of locating public space in a complex world using the systemic approach, so that the whole issue can be addressed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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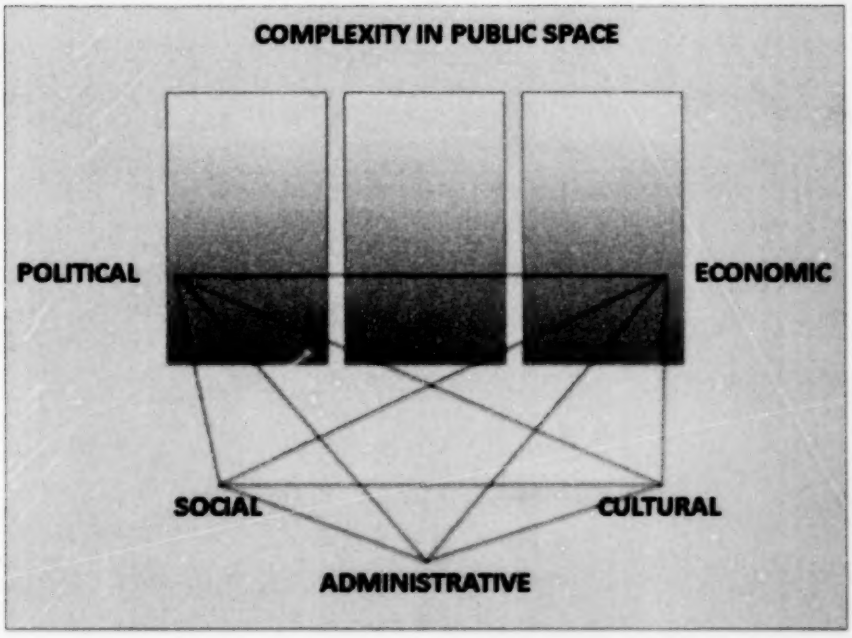
[4] Edgar Morin, *Introducción al pensamiento complejo* (Introduction to complex thinking) (Barcelona, Gedisa, 2009) and David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1965).

[5] Course on the challenges of Mexico's future, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, January 2005. Cited in José R. Castelazo, *Administración Pública: Una Visión de Estado* (Public Administration: A State Vision) (Mexico City, National Institute of Public Administration, 2010), p. 147.

[6] Prepared by the author on the basis of the Spanish: a "pre-text" leads to reflection before a position is taken, "con-text" is in the present, indicates different actions to be taken and constructs scenarios with various possible bases for decisions that result in a "text" with general objectives, accompanied by a "technical operative text" for the purpose of achieving objectives and implementing decisions.

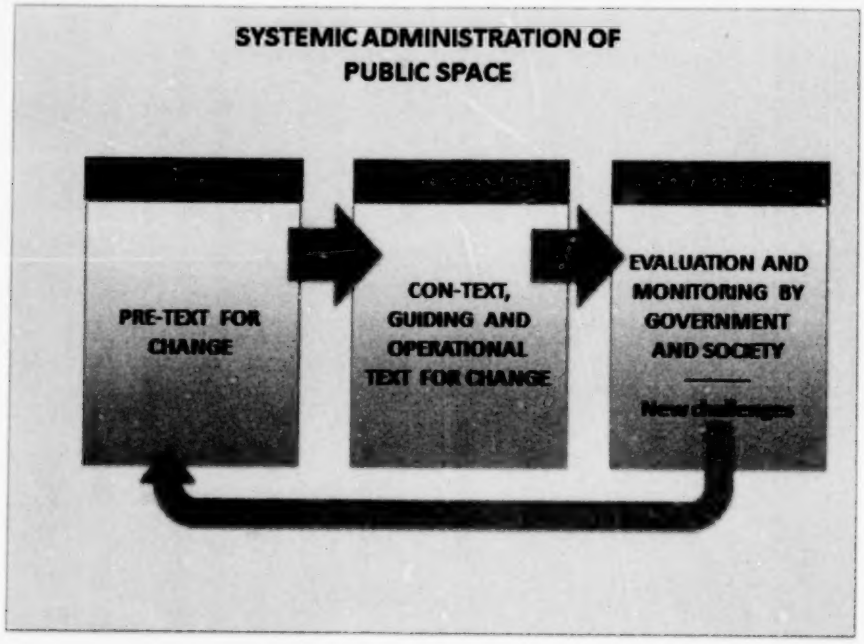
[7] Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *Teoría General de los Sistemas* (General System Theory), 2nd ed. (Madrid, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976).

Figure 1
Complexity in public space



10. This figure provides a holistic perspective for ensuring the thorough and ongoing review of current circumstances in the changing reality around us, in a network of constant interaction, with the participation of multiple actors that put forward different ideas and defend various interests, all of which must be taken into account in order to prepare for the relevant change.

Figure II
Systemic administration of public space

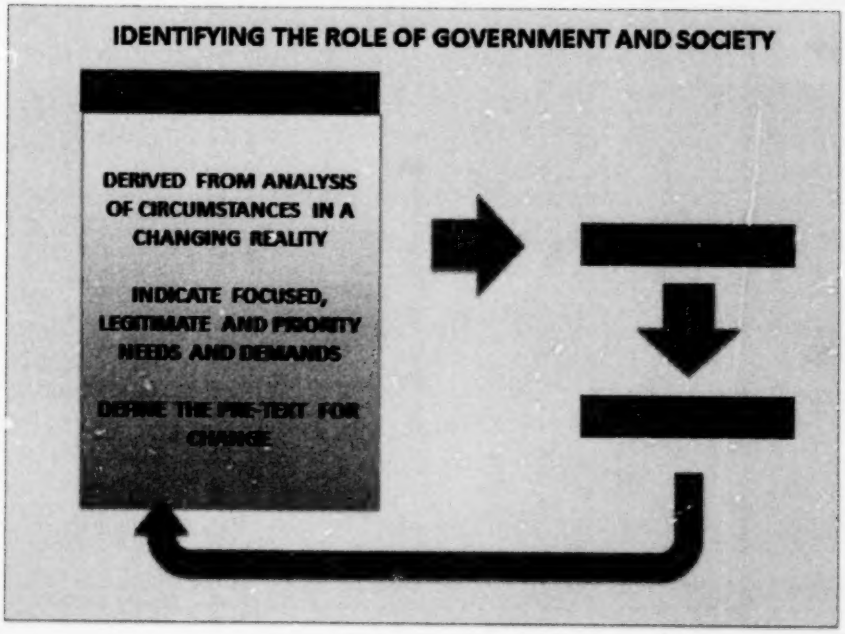

SYSTEMIC ADMINISTRATION OF PUBLIC SPACE
PRE-TEXT FOR CHANGE
CON-TEXT, GUIDING AND OPERATIONAL TEXT FOR CHANGE
EVALUATION AND MONITORING BY GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY
New challenges

11. The diagram represents the route to be followed; it sticks to a scientific method, without forgoing creativity and survival instincts with regard to sustainability.

12. The systemic approach is not dogmatic; it constitutes a link between democratic values, events that occur and actions that are taken to achieve democracy. It is a pragmatic scientific resource, removed from ideological influences or schools of thought that involve attempts to impose their own agendas. It is an inclusive approach.

13. This rapprochement between theory and practice opens the door to understanding that solving problems in a context of complexity has to be the result of hard work built on knowledge.

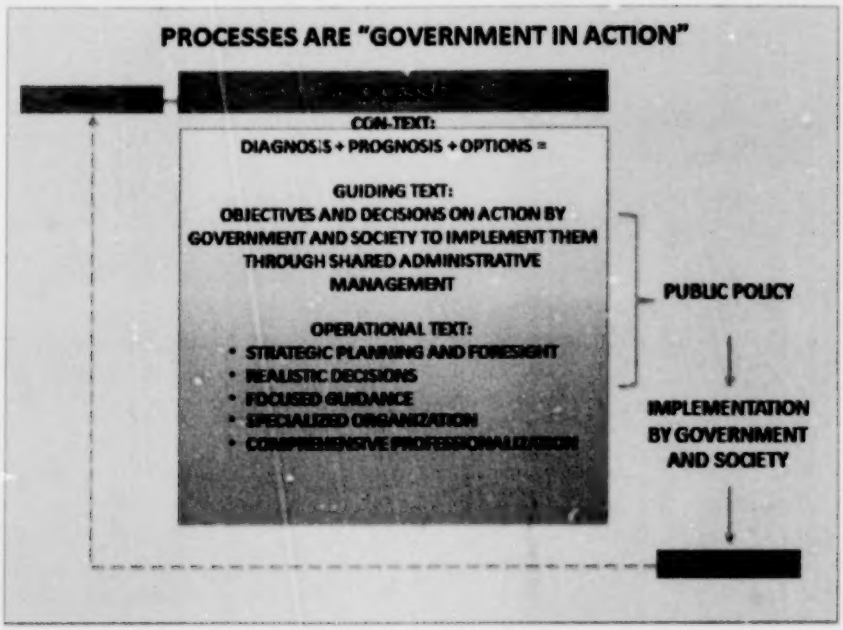
Figure III
Identifying the role of government and society


IDENTIFYING THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY
DERIVED FROM ANALYSIS OF CIRCUMSTANCES IN A CHANGING REALITY
INDICATE FOCUSED, LEGITIMATE AND PRIORITY NEEDS AND DEMANDS
DEFINE THE PRE-TEXT FOR CHANGE

14. The inputs are material and intellectual elements that can be disaggregated in order to understand causes and effects. Consideration will have to be given to whether they are retained, modified or replaced by new components that meet the needs and demands (real, perceived and/or created) of different social groups so as to define, in conjunction with those groups, priorities and actions that are conducive to change and that provide the pre-text for action, uniquely with regard to the exercise of public power.

15. This reality localizes and focuses needs and also establishes the path to solutions; it thereby shapes the authentic and legitimate inputs that are vital in order for joint action to be launched by government and society.

Figure IV
Processes are "government in action"

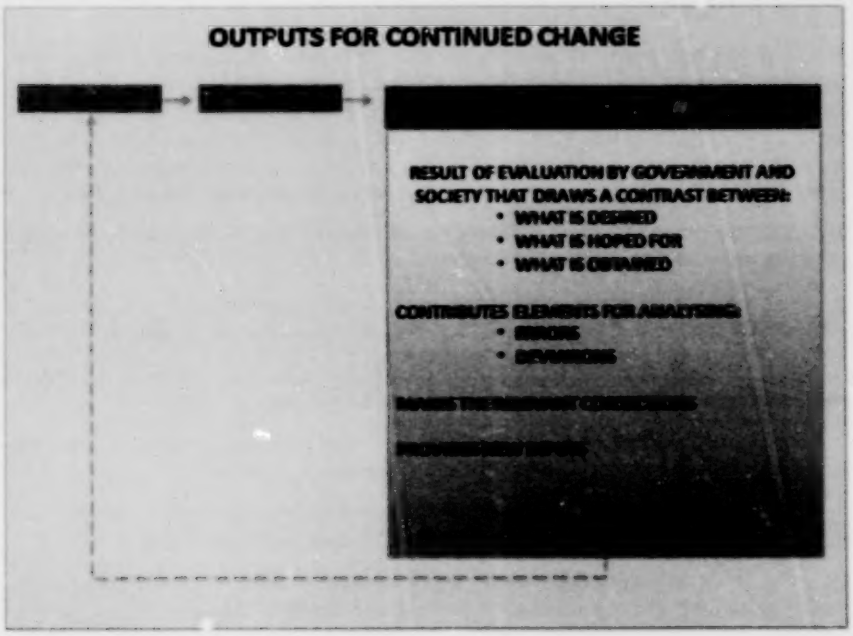

PROCESSES ARE "GOVERNMENT IN ACTION"
CON-TEXT:
DIAGNOSIS + PROGNOSIS + OPTIONS =
GUIDING TEXT:
OBJECTIVES AND DECISIONS ON ACTION BY GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY TO IMPLEMENT THEM THROUGH SHARED ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT
OPERATIONAL TEXT:
• STRATEGIC PLANNING AND FORESIGHT
• REALISTIC DECISIONS
• FOCUSED GUIDANCE
• SPECIALIZED ORGANIZATION
• COMPREHENSIVE PROFESSIONALIZATION
PUBLIC POLICY
IMPLEMENTATION BY GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY

16. Taking this step makes it possible to perform a general and specific diagnosis of the situation concerned that can be used to predict the immediate and medium-term future and makes clear the scale of the change or changes and the efforts at rational organization that are required both of government and of society, united in a common purpose.

17. The study of needs and possible solutions establishes the con-text, with its limitations and opportunities, and gives rise to the text, which is translated into plans, strategies, programmes, budgets, possibilities, organization and processes — in short, applied knowledge and transformative action in order to obtain outputs that are satisfactory for human development in a community.

18. Constructing the con-text and the text is a political decision, since it requires different types of negotiation and coordination based on knowledge that is shared by government and society and that makes them aware of the urgent need to join forces at different levels, from the international to the local, with broad participation and an inclusive attitude on the part of all; the need to measure economic conditions so as to make change viable; and the need to open up channels for the development of different institutional capacities strengthened by a solid social fabric.

Figure V
Outputs for continued change


OUTPUTS FOR CONTINUED CHANGE
RESULT OF EVALUATION BY GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY THAT DRAWS A CONTRAST BETWEEN:
• WHAT IS DESIRED
• WHAT IS HOPED FOR
• WHAT IS OBTAINED

19. The figure represents the type of evaluation by government and society that is to be used, given the need to standardize criteria and to define parameters and indicators that go beyond the current situation and to generate projections that extend further in time and space and that deliver the depth of transformations that sustainable development requires.

20. The challenge of evaluating sustainable development outputs is no less great. It is imperative to create a new culture for the current generations as a precaution against the difficulties and serious obstacles that future generations will encounter in living in harmony with each other and with nature: new legislation, new organization of government and society, new administrative practices based on new democratic practices, such as those relating to human rights, inclusion, transparency, accountability, control, etc.

21. It is therefore necessary to rethink "public space" as a legally delimited forum so as to identify the type of responsibility required by contemporary society, which hinges on rational and active organization, without fragmenting the State's authority and taking care to ensure that the distribution of power strengthens rather than weakens the State. In other words, it is necessary to shift to a post-bureaucratic stage where the roles of government and organized society are joined in an effective, legally shared and binding responsibility.[8]

[8] Jordi Borja and Zaida Muxi, *El espacio público, ciudad y ciudadanía* (Public space, city and citizenship) (Barcelona, 2000).

Public value geared towards social cohesion

22. Public value should be viewed from a platform that connects the social sphere with the political, economic and cultural spheres.[9]

23. The social sphere is actively oriented towards community cohesion and interconnectedness; the political sphere towards the peaceful resolution of conflicts through the law and the civility of the actors; and the economic sphere towards social productivity, which, when combined with stability — and in conjunction with the political sphere — enables homeostasis to be achieved in the system. Lastly, the cultural sphere is focused on the features and characteristics that make up identity.

24. The combination of these factors makes it possible to list a number of public values that are closely related:

(a) A collective commitment to act in accordance with the law, defending individual rights, provided that the rights of all are preserved and protected;

(b) Cooperation within the group and with and between institutions, with a view to exceeding the current conditions for sustainability;

(c) Institutional solidarity and solidarity with people in order to support the activities of society at all times and in all circumstances;

(d) The fostering of institutional productivity between society and government in order to improve the quality of life now and in the future.

25. The interconnectedness of these public values is likely to enrich the value of public space and also to strengthen private and personal spaces: feeling secure, respected and included in the decision-making process will foster loyalty to institutions and enhance brotherhood and the feeling of belonging both to a particular country and to the world as a whole.

26. This combination of factors makes sense in a multicultural society, which in various ways threatens community integration, partly because the dominant socioeconomic system[10] exacerbates inequality and partly because of the tendency of different groups to turn inward, which gives rise to a lack of communication and a lack of tolerance.

27. It is therefore important to understand that the public sphere is a part of life at all times: in health, education, housing, services and recreation, and indeed in the interaction of individuals with the government and within their different social contexts, such as family, work and leisure time.

III. Categorization of public space

28. The systemic approach leads to the establishment of categories in which the dimensions of public spaces and their consistent impact on each individual, and on the social groups in which they interact, serve as reference points. While such

[9] Amartya Sen, "Democracy as a universal value", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 10, No. 3 (1999) and Norberto Bobbio, "The great dichotomy: public/private", in *Democracy and Dictatorship: The Nature and the Limits of State Power* (Cambridge, United States, MIT Press, 1989).

[10] Thomas Piketty, *El capital en el siglo XXI* (Capital in the Twenty-First Century) (Mexico City, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2015).

interaction may clearly take many different forms, there is an unavoidable link between authority and responsibility in decision-making and in public policy formulation, programming, implementation and evaluation, and in future results (strategic foresight).[11]

Dimensions of the system

29. Urie Bronfenbrenner proposes a system that is structured by levels in his book *The Ecology of Human Development*. Three of these levels serve the purposes of our argument: the macro, meso and micro levels.[12] The author argues that the capacity to form a system depends on the existence of social interconnections, both within the system and to external systems, in a codependency that requires constant interaction.

30. In this paper "macro" is comparable to the global level, "meso" to the regional and continental level and "micro" to the national level, which is divided into the subnational and local levels. Since the global, regional and continental levels transcend borders, they fall within the international dimension.

31. From this viewpoint, public space can be categorized on the basis of a common denominator: the legal value of property (public, social and private), a factor that makes it possible to identify State responsibility, which is assumed to be the manifestation of the democratic will of the majority.[13]

32. It is understandable that at the macro and meso levels, the participation and responsibility of society with respect to governments is not immediately apparent, since these are complex organizations comprising States and, in some cases, there is a complex network of social structures, international foundations and business consortia working alongside them or dependent on them. As can be seen below, it is only at the micro level that the responsibility of society as a co-participant in governance emerges more clearly.[14]

Taxonomy of public space

33. Here it is useful to recall the relevance of sovereignty and autonomy, which are of paramount importance for the public interest at the three proposed levels, whether for the well-being of the entire world or for that of a region, continent or country. For a better understanding, the following categories of analysis could be proposed to determine the scope and limits of each level:[15] public-public space, public-social space and public-private space.

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[11] Michel Godet, "Strategic Foresight: Problems and Methods".

[12] Urie Bronfenbrenner, *La Ecología del Desarrollo Humano* (The Ecology of Human Development) (Barcelona, Paidós, 1987). Of the seven categories proposed by the author, it is useful to refer to three in characterizing public space: the macrosystem, the mesosystem and the microsystem.

[13] These are the systems of consensus that each country establishes in the quest for governance that gives precedence to the law; otherwise it is impossible to safeguard freedoms and justice.

[14] Governance is understood as "all mechanisms, processes and rules whereby the economic, political and administrative authority of an organization is exercised...". See http://www.igep.org.ar/index.php/gobernanza.

[15] This methodological formulation is the result of personal reflections from teaching and research.

34. Among the levels referred to, public-public space is the one where responsibility lies exclusively with the authorities that have been legitimately established as representatives of the State. Whatever its radius of influence, it is the physical space that is indivisible from the performance of State functions.

(a) At the global or macro level, the most emblematic public-public body is the United Nations and all its components dealing with economic, social, cultural, technological and, indeed, public administration development. There are also international financial mechanisms, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and development agencies, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

(b) At the meso level, global institutions have equivalents in continental or intercontinental regions (the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, for example). Such institutions have strengthened their economic, cultural and administrative alliances in order to reap more global benefits, which can be translated into well-being for their populations. Clearly, governments and their public administrations are heavily involved in both making and implementing political decisions.

(c) In the case of the American continent, the foremost institutions are the Organization of American States, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Inter-American Development Bank; and, in the cultural sphere, the Instituto Cervantes, supported by Spain to defend the Spanish language throughout the Americas.

(d) In North America, two prominent examples are the North American Free Trade Agreement between Canada, the United States and Mexico, and the Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration; Central American institutions include the Central American Integration System and the Central American Common Market; and South America has the Common Market of the South and the Union of South American Nations. These three subregions have set up many more intergovernmental mechanisms which, in the interests of economy, could not be mentioned in this brief paper; nonetheless, while there is intensive interaction among governments, at times scant results have been achieved compared with the expectations expressed in their founding documents.

(e) The same pattern is repeated on the other four continents, among which the European Union stands out for its originality, characterized by a complex network of interests, ideas and cultures that reflect the current dialectic, compared with the other continents and within its own context. This does not mean that the other regions of the world, each with their own historical development, have not established appropriate or equally original mechanisms that afford them harmonious and economically functional coexistence.[16]

(f) At the micro level, institutions from the three branches of government are represented at the national, subnational and local levels, where it is theoretically possible to provide citizens and social groups with effective, respectful and friendly access to public services. This is where the best opportunities exist to establish channels of joint responsibility between society and government.

35. Let us now turn to public-social space, where responsibility is shared between government and society for various purposes that benefit the latter. Shared responsibility can take legal form through licences and concessions granted by the

[16] http://www.iccnow.org/?mod=rio&lang=en.

State to social groups or individuals, under conditions that not only safeguard the public property of the State but also ensure that the goals giving rise to such collective benefit agreements are achieved. Similarly, arrangements can be concluded in line with political, economic and social commitments that are democratically agreed by the community and government and which, when properly promoted and protected by the law, foster a civic culture.

(a) At the macro level, the International Olympic Committee is a good example of this model, since it is a non-profit, non-governmental organization but could not survive without the participation of States, as its purpose is to promote peace through sport.[17]

(b) The International Diabetes Federation, which is associated with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat and has relations with the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization, consists of individual and collective members. It does not belong to any government, corporation or group, has its own resources and is self-sustaining.[18]

(c) At the meso level is the Latin American Human Rights Association — a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization — whose members are renowned intellectuals from the entire continent; mention could also be made of the Latin American and Caribbean Committee of Professional Organizations for Social Work/Social Service. This field clearly includes many prestigious organizations, which invariably seek economic and political support from States in the performance of their tasks.

(d) At the micro level are public universities and schools, which have autonomy over their management but are nevertheless held to account as they depend on public funds. In this case, responsibility lies with their communities, which aim to raise the level of talent in their country through the quality of its graduates and the contribution they make towards development. The same criterion could be applied to freely available cultural and recreation centres, to the maintenance of general communication channels and their assets, among a plethora of examples at the national, subnational and local levels.

36. Public-private space (where private property is used to provide a public service, to participate in the construction of infrastructure or to engage in production in the primary or secondary sectors) involves economic and/or social activities that address collective needs in exchange for a profit. The requirements imposed by the State guarantee the conditions for sanitation, public health, the safety of people and property, and the maintenance of infrastructure. Other precautions safeguard the public services or the quality of production for which this space is intended.

(a) In the case of public-private organizations at the macro level, specific goals are targeted; for example, global sport has Formula 1 or the International Tennis Federation. These are profit-making organizations, although they have a public impact and must therefore adhere to contracts or agreements negotiated with the authorities of each country.

[17] International Olympic Committee. See http://www.olympic.org/content/the-ioc/governance/introductionold.

[18] See http://www.idf.org.

(b) This public-private model is well-known because of the current boom in public-private associations, which are opening up a new dimension in public administration with regard to the shared responsibility between society and government, more so than in other kinds of public-service-oriented private companies.

(c) Financial and business matters dominate the global stage; in a well-designed strategy, the production of capital and consumer goods has shifted to dependent countries, while rich countries focus on the development of cutting-edge technology and the control of financial markets. Advanced countries, on the one hand, focus their domestic markets on services and, on the other, promote those services in the world's big cities (which account for over 60 per cent of the population), as well as domestic and international tourism (15.4 per cent of the global population with purchasing power), in a constant flow that follows a model in which consumerism is given priority as an engine for growth.[19]

(d) At the micro level, notable examples include private education at all levels, private health care in all its forms, condominium or rental housing, public transport, markets and shopping centres, food and beverage outlets, recreation, shows, culture, sports and community life.

37. In addition to these three categories of public space that are particularly identified with physical territories or locations, there exists a space that also belongs to all, made possible by technology, which is commonly called "virtual", through which the ideas that constitute experience and its collective expression are received and disseminated, with freedom, equity and channels for feedback. To guarantee its reliability, this virtual realm should be regulated by law in order to promote and protect the public values mentioned above, in an environment of harmonization of interests and ideas which lead to constructive and democratic coexistence.

38. In the paragraphs below the interweaving of the aforementioned levels and types surrounding public space will be analysed. This will allow difficulties in their administration to be pointed out and the challenges involved in developing institutional capacity to be measured for each of these actors: government, society and individuals.

(a) It can be agreed that the organization of the State in public space should be interlinked with the law, specifically international, constitutional and administrative public law.

(b) It must be accepted that State authority is represented by government, subdivided into the three traditional powers and the three spheres already known within each country, whatever its form of government — unitary, federal, parliamentary, congressional, etc.

(c) The public administration, in its meaning of exclusive responsibility, expresses itself through the regulation of efficient, effective and transparent government functions, which cannot be delegated to other sectors of society (national security, foreign affairs, finance, domestic policy, sustainability policy). This is distinct from joint government administration which is shared with various

[19] Roberto Bermejo Gómez De Segura, *La Gran Transición Hacia la Sostenibilidad: Principios y Estrategias de Economía Sostenible* (The big transition to sustainability: principles and strategies for a sustainable economy) (Madrid, Los Libros de la Catarata, 2005).

actors of organized society in the areas of social development, political and civic culture, rational cooperation, civil protection, solidarity, productivity, maintenance and improvement of public services, infrastructure, sustainability, etc. Supervisory administration, by concession, delegates to individuals the construction and maintenance of infrastructure and promotion of public services (highways, airports, passenger transport) among other tasks of a public nature.

(d) The global (macro), continental or regional (meso) and national (micro) levels communicate and interact intensively and on a daily basis because they must solve problems that affect everyone in various ways in accordance with the sphere or scale of reference, for instance, climate change, security, financial, market and democratic crises, inequality and poverty, which, as part of the system, influence one another.[20]

(e) It follows that the design and implementation of public policies must necessarily encompass the three levels; it must include the whole and the parts in an effort to link interests that involves risks and costs, but at the same time provides political, economic and social compensations (Goal 2 of the 2030 Agenda is a paradigm of this statement).

39. All these aspects intersect in public space and require coordination and communication of unprecedented scale among sectors and on the ground and consequently require the development of institutional, but also inter-institutional, capacity, which obliges the State, probably as never before, to share power.

Achieving global reality

40. It should be stressed that such interaction requires unprecedented levels of government action in the areas of security and regulation. The complexity is so broad and operates at so many levels simultaneously that it produces a lack of coordination between society and government, as well as a diffusion of responsibility; however, these problems can be remedied by going down to the meso and micro levels, where better social control is possible.

41. These circumstances are a global source of concern, to the extent that the General Assembly of the United Nations, at its seventieth session, adopted on 25 September 2015 the resolution establishing the Sustainable Development Goals, to be achieved within the next fifteen years, set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:[21]

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

[20] For example, migration motivated by violence and lack of opportunity and the obstacles raised by receiving countries, which apply a contradictory policy based on ideological or cultural rejection, in contrast with the need for cheap and non-organized labour.

[21] See General Assembly resolution 70/1.

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

42. These ideals should be viewed holistically since all the goals expressed are priorities; all present the same degree of importance or urgency because they are interconnected. This means that, whatever the cause, there will be positive or negative impacts depending on whether or not they are addressed as a responsibility in each of the types of public space (public-public, public-social, public-private) and at each level — macro, meso and micro — in accordance with the conditions in each country.

43. Clearly, the 17 goals involve all governments and societies and, therefore, their public administrations.

IV. Institutional capacity

44. For the purposes of this paper, two of the goals call attention to the task of analysing institutional capacity. The understanding is that the greatest and best capacity that a State can display is the rule of law, which assumes a civic education and culture that bring together attitudes and practices of social cohesion for the achievement of any common purpose:

(a) Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels;

(b) Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

45. The reference to "building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions" and "strengthening the means of implementation" leads directly to reflections on the institutional capacity that each State possesses; therefore, States should face their realities with objectivity, given that not all countries are at the same level of development. Indicators, while they refer to statistics, do not go into depth on history and socioeconomic, political and cultural conditions, so that presenting homogenized solutions has historically proven to be bad advice.[22] Consequently, each space should generate specific possible solutions that can be channelled towards the achievement of these major goals.

46. The two words making up the concept "institutional capacity" lead to the image, on the one hand, of a congruent set of knowledge, skills and experience ("expertise") ordered in such a way as to lead to the achievement of various targets, which in turn fulfil previously established purposes; on the other hand, the word "institutional" introduces the idea of an organizational structure that guarantees that such knowledge effectively leads to a goal, without unnecessary delays or deviations. Both are familiar in bureaucratic models geared to interests that are far from the public interest.

47. In order to avoid these deviations, technology is available to public administrations to follow up and evaluate plans, programmes, budgets and results, but, more importantly, to raise awareness among leaders in the public, social and private spheres that the world has before it an opportunity to change course and right the ship to establish a foundation for sustainable development.

Choosing systematization in order to unite the will in a common purpose

48. A systematic focus and institutional capacity are joined; they foster systematization in seeking various solutions to multiple problems of the State.[23] Naturally, when speaking of sustainable development, diversity, multiplicity, simultaneity and multiculturalism present themselves in any of the projected scenarios, which leads to the question, how to square the circle?[24]

[22] The initiatives of the United Nations and global financial institutions have faced obstacles to standardization: "recipes" do not apply, or a country is not ready or equipped to adopt or adapt them. However, among the efforts of recent years, the Millennium Development Goals stand out, as they achieved results ranging from spectacular to modest. Similar results are hoped for from the Sustainable Development Goals, but now the world is better prepared because of its previous experience.

[23] Oscar Oszlak and Edgardo Orellana, *El Análisis de la Capacidad Institucional: Aplicación de la Metodología* (Analysis of institutional capacity: application of methodology) (Buenos Aires, SADCI, 1993).

[24] John Robinson, "Squaring the circle? Some thoughts on the idea of sustainable development", *Ecological Economics*, vol. 48, No. 4, pp. 369-384.

49. This can be achieved only with good organization in a dual sense: first as a concept of strategy to combine efforts from various sources of power and decision-making — intergovernmental, inter-institutional, intra-institutional, sectoral and intersectoral; and secondly as a hierarchical structure, both functional and operational, of the corresponding tasks, where communication and coordination prevail in joint action.[25]

Rationality within institutions

50. Herbert Simon and James March referred decades ago to rationality as reflected in organizational charts, but they went beyond simply considering the design of the structure to examine, first and foremost, the thinking behind the organization. Answering basic questions (Why? How? When? Where? How much? Who?) requires rationalization, and this means that difficult decisions have to be made, including about leadership and management.[26]

51. Administrative behaviour, which is born of organizational theory, allows the principle of decision-making to be applied to the social system. Translated into public administration terms, this principle presupposes that a variety of options are available for institutional development in the broadest sense of the term, that is, at the micro level: local government or a community within it. In this case, the option that will best meet the need is relatively clear. Decision-making becomes more complicated at the regional and/or continental (meso) levels. At the global (macro) level, there is an abundance of options and it will therefore be necessary to "square the circle" in order to determine priorities.

52. It is interesting to see how the systemic approach, organizational theory and institutional capacity come into play and how they can be shaped in order to achieve the sustainability goals that the world has set itself at the highest level. All actors face the challenge of developing the capacity to govern[27] complex systems.

53. This capacity is not limited to having control over one or more concurrent situations; it also involves collecting and analysing information and developing convincing arguments to put to those responsible for working towards the common purpose, which is to go through successive stages of development together until the previously determined objectives have been achieved.[28]

54. This capacity to govern comprises two elements related to the professionalization of the administration of public space. The first is social organization which, if it is not institutionalized, can be effective for a time but is not sustainable, and the second is the professionals who participate in the process by making or implementing decisions. The two elements must ultimately combine in

[25] The preparations for the Normandy landings, which made possible the liberation of Paris (Second World War), are an example of strategy and teamwork. This event gave political, economic, social and administrative meaning to the "Roadmap" technique.

[26] Herbert Simon and James March, *Organizations*.

[27] Yeheskel Dror, *La Capacidad de Gobernar* (The capacity to govern) (Mexico City, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996).

[28] Giandomenico Majone, *Evidencia, argumentación y persuasión en la formulación de políticas* (Evidence, arguments and persuasion in policy formulation) (Mexico City, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Colegio Nacional de Ciencias Políticas y Administración Pública, 1997).

order to ensure the fulfilment of the expectations set out in the two goals of the 2030 Agenda referred to above, which are notable for their focus on public service.

Professionalization from a shared perspective

55. Given that responsibility for public space is shared, the professionalization of its management concerns not only the various levels and functions of government but also organized society in its various forms and, in particular, citizens. It is therefore essential to emphasize the importance of the common commitment to coexist in a peaceful and inclusive manner, with the support of the authority that protects everything and everyone.

56. As stated earlier, professionalization is dependent upon an appropriate institutional set-up, which requires a legal status encompassing the scope and limits of the institution; manuals on organization, procedures, policies and regulations concerning the conduct of institutions and individuals working in and for the public service; and transparency, accountability, evaluation and monitoring.

57. With regard to staffing, recruitment and selection should be based on a commitment to service, and induction and continuous learning programmes should be provided, along with sustainability awareness as part of comprehensive ethics training. It is not "just another job" (public, private or social) but rather a conscious cultural shift in cooperation for the purpose of sustainability; it is not, therefore, a budgeted public position that can be retained with a conservative, limited effort allowing the individual to remain in his or her comfort zone.

58. While the shared responsibility for managing public space requires the three sectors to work together, only the one that is in authority will be paid from public resources; the other participants will be involved in an individual capacity. The latter may in some cases expect payment not necessarily from the public purse but from funds set aside for a specific project (whether profit-making or not), which will be used to maintain, expand and/or improve the project. This will entail a certain amount of compensation.

59. An example of this type of State-regulated project is the protection of nature reserves or archaeological sites. In such cases, clear rules are established with the communities in the region, local staff are employed, tourism infrastructure is built with local materials, training/instruction is provided for the population and tourists, and the sustainability of public space is ensured through shared and regulated responsibility.[29]

From commitments to concrete results

60. The fifteen-year time frame for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals seems short, and indeed it is, given the magnitude and diversity of the issues that the goals seek to address and the enormous obstacles that will have to be overcome. John Maynard Keynes' dictum that "in the long run, we are all

[29] International Union for Conservation of Nature. See https://www.iucn.org/about/union/members.

dead"[30] makes sense in light of the urgency of each and every one of those problems in the current context of deteriorating physical and social conditions around the world.

61. Therefore, to respond to the call from the United Nations, governments and societies will have to begin intensive work immediately. Those efforts must be based on the setting of priorities, according to what is urgent, necessary, desirable and achievable, in line with the specific circumstances of each country. Societies must determine which of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals will drive the achievement of the other goals, with a view to attaining the overall objective of a better quality of life.

Integrative communication intelligence

62. An essential task of the public administration is to call on different actors in order to establish a basis of participation and consensus for the achievement of the sustainability goals.

63. There is a need to raise awareness within the community through ongoing campaigns focusing on specific issues. These campaigns should identify the way forward, the tasks of each actor, means of capturing opinions and ways to administer surveys.

64. Once these bases have been established, integrative communication intelligence must be used to organize diverse groups from a variety of spheres and levels and to ensure productive coordination between them in order to identify a series of tasks that can be organized into a logical sequence of activities, for example:

(a) Creation and design of strategic, integrated public policies by three actors (government, organized society and citizens), which themselves comprise numerous institutions

(i) The three branches of government must serve a single purpose: overcoming obstacles such as those that occur in so-called divided governments.[31] This can be achieved on the basis of shared administrative methods and techniques that can be applied broadly, which various governments can use without compromising their views.

(ii) Beyond these political and partisan considerations, only intra- and inter-institutional coordination will enable all actors to work together to achieve the agreed goals.

[30] This phrase means that decisions should be made and implemented quickly, as establishing long time frames for addressing problems leads to procrastination.

[31] Where the branches are governed by different political parties, as frequently occurs in presidential systems, although municipal governments in unitary States also tend to reflect a plurality of political affiliations. Similarly, spheres of power are normally shared in two-party systems.

(iii) The intelligence that a government must exercise includes convincing multiple social actors with different objectives, visions, ideologies, prejudices and even grievances.[32]

(iv) Strategic planning: once priorities have been identified, preparations must be made for systemic change. Places and people must be chosen. Commitments must be clearly expressed and work on the ground must begin by using partnership as a social movement, which must involve long-term alliances. For example, which government entities, and at what level (local, subnational, national or international), should be involved, and alongside which companies, non-governmental organizations, public-social associations, public-private associations, foundations and cooperation organizations of all kinds, financial institutions, etc.?

(b) Policy implementation

(i) The implementation of the various plans and programmes requires knowledge and skills in the area of sustainability and a conviction on the part of the public administration that it not only can, but must, lead the effort.

(ii) This major socioeconomic and political effort must involve extensive use of information and communications technology. It is vital to develop interoperability to ensure that systems can understand one another, given the high level of competition between software and hardware producers that seek to offer the best equipment, programs and applications but in languages exclusive to their brand. When making decisions on updating software, developers strive for innovation as an essential requirement but do not give sufficient consideration to the real needs of users and which of the existing elements should be retained in order to facilitate the life of institutions.

(iii) The evaluation of public policy should follow new approaches, in particular a move from rigidity to flexibility. This means that policy implementation cannot be confined to a single path; rather, various scenarios and alternative courses of action should be envisaged, in line with the complexities of the current situation. It should be borne in mind that desired outcomes can be stratified to take into account the conditions and circumstances of the decision-making process and what is actually feasible given the realities of the situation, so that what is achieved may be satisfactory, if not optimal. This helps to prevent indifference, negligence and sheer irresponsibility.

(iv) By means of constant evaluation throughout the successive stages of the process, it is possible to identify successes and errors, make appropriate corrections, confirm progress and record and systematize experience for use in future projects. Without effective evaluation, there is a risk of operating outside of the sustainability criteria.

[32] Even the need to control climate change has an impact on interests related to socioeconomic differences, privileges and resistance to change. For example, despite the environmental disaster in Beijing in December 2015, at almost exactly the same time China, India, Brazil and South Africa were refusing to be considered equal with certain other countries for carbon emissions purposes. Fortunately, following intense negotiations, the 196 countries participating in the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris endorsed the first global agreement on global warming.

Key principles to be observed by society and government institutions in order to achieve sustainability

(a) Openness

(i) This principle is primarily a political issue as it is the responsibility of democratic governments to set an example by demonstrating transparency, accountability and responsible social communication. However, governments cannot do this without society and citizens adopting the same attitude, since "open government" as it is called is very difficult to achieve if society is not open. Moreover, open government calls for the responsible management of information, which involves making such information available to citizens and organized society.

(b) Decision-making and shared responsibility for managing public space

(i) Consultation exercises: these must be organized with tripartite participation through representatives of local and subnational government, as well as national government, where appropriate, depending on the magnitude of the project; representatives of relevant sections of organized society according to the nature and purpose of the project; and citizen representatives, as appropriate, depending on how the space will be used on a daily basis.

(ii) Establish prior agreements concerning the type of consultation (open, selective, joint), who will be consulted, procedures and tools.

(iii) Disseminate information on the joint management of the public space concerned using appropriate means in line with the end purpose.

(iv) Define the resources and activities for the sustainability of the project, including security.

(v) Determine the responsibilities for the project and assign them among the three actors.

(vi) Set the rules for access to and use of the space by those actors and others.

(vii) Once these and other aspects have been defined, decisions are taken to exercise authority and ensure that the space can be used freely, taking into account the rights of third parties.

(c) Definition of a protocol on shared responsibilities

(d) Give public space that is subject to shared public-social responsibility legal status and personality under the relevant public law

(e) Humanize technology: the redistribution of responsibilities in public space inevitably requires public administrations to modernize in order to harness the collective effort to respond appropriately to the demands of society and be able to qualify its institutional performance and thereby cultivate respect and a collaborative attitude among institutions and citizens.

65. In this context, information and communications technologies provide a unique opportunity to innovate and radically transform institutional spaces and social relations for the better. As already emphasized, the availability of technological resources enhances the capacity to understand phenomena, their causes and ways to manage them. The use of these technologies facilitates

continuous improvement, the design of processes, decision-making and the implementation of actions to enhance the capacity to bring together individual, collective and institutional goals.

66. Although technological advancements have without a doubt strengthened institutional capacities, responsibility for implementation ultimately lies with human beings; as a result, it is essential to find ways to use technological connectivity but with a humanist approach, which means valuing the individual while enriching the community. In short, it is about giving priority to people over things, and ensuring that society is given its rightful place without nullifying the individual as the origin and ultimate aim of the collective endeavour.

V. A corollary

67. The principles that apply to the exercise of public authority by society, as developed by theory specialists, academics and civil servants, also apply to the management of public space, both in terms of the expanded administrative process and policies relating to transparency and accountability, impartiality, fairness, efficiency and effectiveness and, above all, continuous evaluation.

68. This leads to questions such as what the macro, meso and micro justice systems are, whether justice is effective and expeditious, and whether there is legal certainty in the protection of rights and freedoms. If the answers to these questions fail to meet the expectations of the majority of the population it would be difficult to manage public space in such a way as to encourage stability and certainty.

69. For all three levels described above, one of the most serious issues for the current political and administrative system is corruption, which is closely linked to fraud and impunity, which are actually at the root of this scourge.

70. Clearly, the punishments and penalties provided for by law apply if the law is violated; this is a safeguard against impunity. However, fraud is exacerbated when malicious personal or private interests, or even complicity with public servants, are being defended, whereas it occurs less frequently when the public interest is respected.

71. The general order of public space would be enriched with constitutional, legislative and regulatory changes designed to facilitate a transition from the current situation, which is in many cases outdated, towards a new reality that involves comprehensive and continuous improvements in living conditions and quality of life. Parliaments and congresses serve as stabilizers, but they are also the custodians of the future in the present. In the current context that responsibility is unavoidable and decisive.

72. As explained earlier, the public interest prevails in the management of public space; this is perceived immediately and leads to thriving proportionate tax systems, which in turn foster the creation of a special civic capacity among the population and attract investment and jobs; this then leads to security, certainty and confidence in institutions.

73. The changes mentioned result in a new view of individual and community life. If we take up the invitation to make the type of changes reflected in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, it is merely a question of altering production and

consumption habits and therefore the economy, labour and social organization. Clearly, it would be necessary to make changes of substance and form when meeting new needs and demands, and the public administration would need to support a new form of comprehensive development, which would not work unless society and citizens were included.

74. The goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[21] promote reflection:

(a) Promote, finance and provide training for activities that encourage the production and consumption of organic food: is this not a transition that would require the participation of government and the public administration? Would it not be a public-public, public-social and public-private space?

(b) Promote and finance organizations that are jointly responsible for health and sanitation: does this not concern another transition, or the same one, which focuses on housing, schools, hospitals, collective centres for work, recreation and culture, road infrastructure and order in the mobility of things and people?

(c) Promote, finance and maintain the main and intermediary infrastructure to connect major cities to towns, semi-urban and rural communities, using regional labour and materials in accordance with the project requirements: does this not entail another transition which calls for further regulation and participation between government and society?

(d) Promote alternative energies that harness the power of nature: does this not require a paradigm shift that entails promoting alternative modes of transport such as bicycles, pedicabs and electric cars?

(e) Improve connectivity between housing and workplaces, educational institutions and other services: this involves promoting and developing inter-city and suburban trains, both elevated and at ground level. Does this not require unprecedented organization of society and government?

75. There are numerous other examples, but the first step is to promote a new global, intermediate and local culture: the culture of sustainability.

76. The public administration has much work to do. As a dynamic agent of government action, it shares responsibility for a peaceful, productive transformation, starting with itself. From there, it needs to expand its horizons and achieve better results that are measurable and can be demanded by organized society and citizens.

77. The issue addressed in this paper could be analysed further and, in fact, it has been already. Numerous studies and research papers on the current global situation have emphasized the increasingly urgent need to take the helm as we navigate these stormy seas and do what needs to be done.

78. Before more years pass, we need to put into practice a new global, intermediate and local culture: the culture of sustainability focused on events rather than on words of warning. We need to take action to address this grave responsibility.